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Chrono - Aug

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6 August 1979

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting Deputy Director, NFAC

SUBJECT : Third World Imagery Analysis

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Brace,

1. In March, we provided John Hicks--at his request--some facts and figures concerning the size and nature of our analytical effort on non-Sino/Soviet countries. He subsequently asked us to prepare a paper in which we would identify the number of additional people we could use effectively over the next five years on those countries. Upon reviewing this paper (a copy is attached) with Wayne and me, John then asked us to examine further the ground forces aspect of the problem. The ground forces issue was singled out because it was our largest identified resource requirement [] of effort) and our most vulnerable area. Obviously [] new positions is pie in the sky, and we are now developing various options that could be adopted to provide better information on third world military forces at much lower cost. []

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2. The recent flap over the presence of a Soviet combat "brigade" in Cuba provides an excellent example of the general problem we face. That is, we are in a precarious position when it comes to confidently providing imagery derived intelligence on the status of ground forces in Third World countries. It also raises the correlative question--what level of in-depth knowledge should be maintained to respond to the ever growing number of Third World intelligence crises? []

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3. For some time, we have been attempting to maintain at least some capability on most of those countries receiving arms shipments or beset by foreign intrusion, but the only areas for which we can claim any depth of knowledge are the Middle East, East Europe, and North Korea. Even this has been a difficult task, because the weight and priority of the Sino-Soviet analytical workload has not diminished. The remainder of the world--the Western Hemisphere (including Cuba), South Asia, Southeast Asia, and most of Africa--receives almost no attention until a flap arises. As a result, our information base on the location, size, structure, and operational and training practices of local conventional forces is almost nonexistent. []

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4. In the recent intelligence crisis on Cuba we were able to make some contribution by borrowing ground forces analysts from other areas. These analysts were able to locate and analyze facilities in the suspect locations and to negate the presence of a large force of Soviet combat troops at the suspect locations. In the Executive Summary of 2 August, I noticed a Collection Tasking Note which said that imagery would not be able to answer questions about the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba. This assertion probably is not true--the answers probably are in the imagery. The point is we do not have anyone familiar enough with Cuban force units and their training practices to detect the subtle differences that undoubtedly exist and are present in the imagery. [redacted]

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5. We are now confronted with two questions regarding Cuba. What type of analytical capability should we build and maintain on Cuban and Soviet military forces and activities in Cuba? And what cost in terms of diminished efforts elsewhere are we willing to pay? Our work to date has only scratched the surface of the Cuban military picture, and we know that a much better job can be done. Although the lack of good photo-derived information base is not unique to Cuba, the time is particularly ripe for acquiring an understanding of Cuban ground forces

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[redacted] (As far as I know, only DIA has made any plans to exploit the large amount of imagery being collected and they plan only to search for the Soviet "brigade.") [redacted]

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6. For illustrative purposes, we have outlined below the approximate costs of achieving various levels of analytical capability on military forces in Cuba.

Option 1--No further analysis of military forces in Cuba with analyst available only as needs dictate. This option gives us no ready capability to deal with future events and will not even maintain the minimal level of understanding we established during the recent flap. It would have no impact on our present manpower allocation. [redacted]

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Option 2--Create a basic data base on military installations in Cuba. This would expedite future current intelligence efforts by having a ready reference file on Cuba, but it would not allow for the development of any in-depth understanding of Cuban or Soviet ground forces in Cuba. This option would require approximately [redacted] to set up and an additional [redacted] to maintain. [redacted]

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Option 3--Perform an in-depth analysis of selected Cuban ground forces. This option would include the analysis of all available photography of three of the 16 Cuban divisional areas to determine the numbers and types of equipment organic to the units, the types and levels of training present within the divisional areas, and attempt to identify signatures which could differentiate a Cuban from a Soviet unit. Any additional attempts to detect a Soviet presence would require

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at least this level of effort. This sampling approach would not provide a complete understanding of the entire Cuban ground forces picture, but it would provide some insight into their force structure.

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should complete this type of effort.

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Option 4--Perform an indepth analysis of all ground forces in Cuba. This approach would involve basically the same analytical process described in Option 3, expanded to include the entire Cuban ground forces. It will give us about the same depth of knowledge that we have on Korea and certain countries in the Mid-East and East Europe. It would provide an accurate yardstick against which any ground force changes could be measured. This option would require about [redacted] of effort for the initial analysis and [redacted] for maintenance.

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7. My purpose in writing this memorandum was not so much to get your immediate and specific guidance on how we should proceed on Cuba-- although we would appreciate any thoughts you have on the subject--as it was to illustrate the nature of the more general problem of Third World analysis that we have faced several times during the past couple of years. It is frustrating to know that the answers to legitimate intelligence questions are available in the imagery, but they're not being extracted because we don't have anyone with the background knowledge to do so.

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[redacted]
Noel E. Firth
Director
Imagery Analysis

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